

MISCHIEF AT ST. ROLLO'S

by Mary Pollock



Illustrated by M. C. Brown

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MISCHIEF AT ST. ROLLO'S

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CHAPTER 1

A NEW SCHOOL

"I don't want to go to boarding-school," said Michael.

"Neither do I," said Janet. "I don't see why we have to, Mother!"

"You are very lucky to be able to go," said Mother.

"Especially together! Daddy and I have chosen a mixed school for you—one with boys and girls together, so that both you and Mike can go together, and not be parted. We know how fond you are of one another. It's quite time you went too. I run after you too much. You must learn to stand on your own feet."

Mother went out of the room. The two children stared at one another. "Well, that's that," said Janet, flipping a pellet of paper at Michael. "We've got to go. But I vote we make our new school sit up a bit!"

"I've heard that you have to work rather hard at St. Rollo's," said Mike. "Well, I'm not going to! I'm going to have a good time. I hope we're in the same class."

There was only a year between the two of them, and as Janet was a clever child, she had so far always been in the same form as her brother, who was a year older. They had been to a mixed school ever since they had first started, and although they now had to go away to boarding-school, they both felt glad that they were not to be parted, as most brothers and sisters had to be.

The last week of the holidays flew past. Mother took the children to the shops to get them fitted for new clothes.

"We do seem to have to get a lot for our new school," said Janet, with interest. "And are we going to have tuck-boxes, Mother, to take back with us?"

"If you're good!" said Mother, with a laugh.

Mother did get them their tuck-boxes—one each for them. She put exactly the same in each box—one big currant cake, one big ginger cake, twelve chocolate buns, a tin of toffee and a large bar of chocolate. The children were delighted.

The day came for them to go to their new school. They couldn't help feeling a bit excited, though they felt rather nervous too. Still, they were to go together, and that would be fun. They caught a train to London, and Mother took them to the station from which the school train was to start.

"St. Rollo's School," said the big blue label on the train. "Reserved for St. Rollo's School." A great crowd of boys and girls were on the platform, talking and laughing, calling to each other. Some were new, and they looked rather lonely and shy. Janet and Mike kept together, looking eagerly at everyone.

"They look rather nice," said Mike to Janet. "I wonder which will be in our form."

Both boys and girls were in grey, and looked neat and smart. One or two masters and mistresses bustled up and down, talking to parents, and warning the children to take their places. Janet and Mike got into a carriage with several other boys and girls.

"Hallo!" said one, a cheeky-looking boy of about eleven. "You're new, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Mike.

"What's your name?" said the boy, his blue eyes twinkling at Mike and Janet.

"I'm Michael Fairley, and this is my sister Janet," said Mike. "What's your name?"

"I'm Tom Young," said the boy. "I should think you'll be in my form. We have fun. Can you make darts?"

"Paper darts," said Mike. "Of course! Everybody can!"

"Ah, but you should see my new kind," said the boy, and he took out a note book with stiff paper leaves. But just as

he was tearing out a sheet the guard blew his whistle, and the train gave a jerk.

“Good-bye, Mother!” yelled Mike and Janet. “Good-bye. We’ll write to-morrow!”

“Good-bye, my dears!” called Mother. “Enjoy yourselves and work hard.”

The train chuffed out of the station. Now that it was really gone the two children felt a bit lonely. It wasn’t going to be very nice not to see Mother and Daddy for some time. Thank goodness they had each other!

Tom looked at them. “Cheer up!” he said. “I felt like that, too, the first time. But you soon get over it. Now just see how I make my new paper darts.”

Tom was certainly very clever with his fingers. In a minute or two he had produced a marvellous pointed dart out of paper, which, when it was thrown, flew straight to its mark.

“Better than most darts, don’t you think?” said Tom proudly. “I thought that one out last term. The first time I threw one it shot straight at Miss Thomas and landed underneath her collar. I got sent out of the room for that.”

Janet and Mike looked at Tom with much respect. All the other children in the carriage laughed.

“Tom’s the worst boy in the school,” said a rosy-cheeked, fat girl. “Don’t take lessons from him—he just doesn’t care about anything.”

“Is Miss Thomas a mistress?” asked Mike. “Do we have masters *and* mistresses at St. Rollo’s?”

“Of course,” said Tom. “If you’re in my form you’ll have Miss Thomas for class-teacher, but a whole lot of other teachers for special subjects. I can tell you whose classes it’s safe to play about in, and whose classes it’s best to behave in.”

“Well, seeing that you don’t behave well in *anybody’s* classes, I shouldn’t have thought you could have told anyone the difference,” said the fat girl.

“Be quiet, Marian,” said Tom. “I’m doing the talking in this carriage!”

That was too much for the other children. They fell on Tom and began to pummel him. But he took it all good-humouredly, and pummelled back hard. Mike and Janet watched, laughing. They didn’t quite like to join in.

Everyone had sandwiches to eat. They could eat them any time after half-past twelve, but not before. Tom produced a watch after a while and looked at it.

“Good!” he said. “It’s half-past twelve.” He undid his packet of sandwiches. Marian looked astonished.

“Tom! It simply *can’t* be half-past twelve yet,” she said. She looked at her wrist-watch. “It’s only a quarter-to.”

“Well, your watch must be wrong then,” said Tom, and he began to eat his sandwiches. Janet looked at her watch. It certainly was only a quarter-to-twelve. She felt sure that Tom had put his watch wrong on purpose.

It made the other children feel very hungry to watch Tom eating his ham sandwiches. They began to think it would be a good idea to put their watches fast, too! But just then a master came down the corridor that ran the length of the train. Tom tried to put away his packet of sandwiches, but he was too late.

“Well, Tom,” said the master, stopping at the door and looking in. “Can’t you wait to get to school before you begin to break the rules?”

“Mr. Wills, sir, my watch says five-and-twenty-to-one?” said Tom, holding out his watch, with an innocent look on his face. “Isn’t it five-and twenty-to-one?”

“You know quite well it isn’t,” said Mr. Wills. He took the watch and twisted the hands back. “Put away your lunch and have it when your watch says half-past twelve,” he said. Tom gave a look at his watch. Then he looked up with an expression of horror.

“Sir! You’ve made my watch half an hour slow! That would mean I couldn’t start my lunch till one o’clock!”

“Well, well, fancy that!” said Mr. Wills. “I wonder which is the more annoying—to have a watch that is fast, or one that is slow, Tom? What a pity! You’ll have to eat your lunch half an hour after the others have finished!”

He went out. Tom stared after him gloomily. “I suppose he thinks that’s funny,” he said.

Tom put away his lunch, for he knew quite well that Mr. Wills might be along again at any moment.

At half-past twelve all the other children took down their lunch packets and undid them eagerly, for they were hungry. Poor Tom had to sit and watch them eat. His watch only said twelve o’clock!

At one, when all the others had finished, he opened his lunch packet again. “Now, of course,” he said, “I’m so terribly hungry that ham sandwiches, egg sandwiches, buttered scones with jam, ginger cake, an apple and some chocolate won’t nearly do for me!”

The train sped on. It was due to arrive at half-past two. When the time came near, Janet and Mike looked out of the windows eagerly. “Can we see St. Rollo’s from the train?” asked Janet.

“Yes. It’s built on a hill,” said Marian. “You’ll see it out of that window. It’s of grey stone and it has towers at each end. In the middle of the building is a big archway. Watch out for it now, you’ll soon see it.”

The children looked out, and, as Marian had said, they caught sight of their new school. It looked grand!

There it stood on the hill with big towers at each end, built of grey stone. Creeper climbed over most of the walls, and here and there a touch of red showed that when autumn came the walls would glow red with the crimson leaves.

The train slowed down at a little station. Everyone got out. Some big coaches were waiting in the little station-yard. Laughing and shouting, the children piled into them. Their luggage was to follow in a van. The masters and mistresses climbed in last of all, and the coaches set off to St. Rollo’s.

They rumbled up the hill and came to a stop before the big archway. The school looked enormous, now that the children were so close to it. All the boys and girls clambered down from the coaches and went in at a big door.

The two children followed Tom up the stairs to a large and cheerful room, into which the afternoon sun poured. A plump, smooth-cheeked woman was sitting there.

"Hallo, Matron," said Tom, going in. "I've brought two new ones to see you. Are they in my dormitory? I hope they are."

"Well, I'm sorry for them if they are!" said Matron, getting out a big exercise book and turning the pages. "What are their names?"

"Michael and Janet Fairley," said Mike. Matron found their names and ticked them off.

"Yes—Michael is in your dormitory, Tom," she said. "Janet is across the passage with Marian and the girls. I hope they will help you to behave better, not worse. And just remember what I told you last term—if you play any tricks on me this term I'll spank you with my hardest slipper!"

Tom grinned. He took Mike's arm and led him away with Janet. "You'll soon begin to think I'm a bad lot!" he said.

"Come on—I'll show you everything."

CHAPTER 2

SETTLING DOWN

There was plenty to see at St. Rollo's. The dormitories were fine big rooms. Each child had a separate cubicle with white curtains to pull around their bed, their dressing-table, and small cupboard. The children's luggage was already in the dormitory when they got there.

"We'll unpack later," said Tom. "Look, that will be my bed. And yours can be next to mine, Mike, if I can arrange it. Look—let's pull your trunk into this cubicle, then no one else will take it."

They pulled the trunk across. Then Tom showed Janet her dormitory, across the passage. It was exactly the same as the boys, except that the beds had pink eiderdowns instead of blue. After that, Tom showed them the classrooms, which were fine rooms, all with great windows looking out on the sunny play-grounds.

"This is our classroom, if you're in my form," said Tom. Janet and Mike liked the look of it very much.

"I had that desk there at the front, last term," said Tom, pointing to one. "I always try to choose one right at the back—but sooner or later I'm always made to sit at the front. People seem to think they have to keep an eye on me. Awfully tiresome!"

"I wonder where our desks will be," said Mike.

"Bag two, if you like," said Tom. "Just dump a few books in. Where do you want to sit?"

"I like being near the window, where I can look out," said Mike. "But I'd like to be where I can see you too, Tom!"

"Well, I shall try to bag a desk at the back as usual," said Tom. He took a few books from a bookshelf and dumped them into a desk in the back row by the window. "That can

be your desk. That can be Janet's. And this can be mine! All in a row together."

Tom showed them the play-grounds and the hockey-fields. He showed them the marvellous gym and the assembly hall where the school met every morning for prayers. He showed them the changing-rooms, where they changed for games, and the common-rooms where each class met out of school to read, write or play games. Janet and Mike began to feel they would lose their way if they had to find any place by themselves!

"We'll go and unpack now," said Tom. "And then it'll be tea-time. Good! We can all have things out of our tuck-boxes to-day."

They went to their dormitories to unpack. Janet parted from the two boys and went into hers. Marian was there, and she smiled at Janet.

"Hallo," she said. "I saw Tom taking you round. He's a kind soul, but he'll lead you into trouble, if he can! Come and unpack. I'll show you where to put your things. I'm head of this dormitory."

Janet unpacked and stowed away her things into the drawers of the dressing-table, and hung her coats in the cupboard. All the other girls were doing the same. Marian called to Janet.

"I say! Do you know any of the others here? That's Audrey near to you. And this is Bertha. And that shrimp is Connie. And here's Doris, who just simply can't help being top of the form, whether she tries or not!"

Doris laughed. She was a clever-looking girl, with large glasses on her nose. "We're all in the same form," she told Janet. "Is your brother in Tom Young's dormitory?"

"Yes," said Janet. "Will he be in my form too?"

"Yes, he will," said Doris. "All the four dormitories on this floor belong to the same form. Miss Thomas is our form-mistress. She's nice but pretty strict. Only one person ever gets the better of her—and that's Tom Young! He just simply

doesn't care what he does—and he's always bottom. But he's nice."

Meanwhile Mike was also getting to know the boys in his dormitory. Tom was telling him about them.

"See that fellow with the cross-eyes and hooked nose? Well, that's Eric."

Mike looked round for somebody with cross-eyes and a hooked nose, but the boy that Tom pointed to had the straightest brown eyes and nose that Mike had ever seen! The boy grinned.

"I'm Eric," he said. "Don't take any notice of Tom. He thinks he's terribly funny."

Tom took no notice. "See that chap over there in the corner? The one with spots all over his face? That's Fred. He gets spots because he eats too many sweets."

"Shut up!" said Fred. He had one small spot on his chin. He was a big, healthy-looking boy, with bright eyes and red cheeks.

"And this great giant of a chap is George," said Tom, pointing to an under-grown boy with small shoulders. The boy grinned.

"You must have your joke, mustn't you?" he said amiably. "And now Mike what-ever-your-name-is, let me introduce you to the world's greatest clown, the world's greatest idiot, Master Thomas Henry William Young, biggest duffer and dunce, and, by a great effort, the bottom of the form!"

Mike roared with laughter. Tom took it all in good part. He gave George a punch which the boy dodged cleverly.

There was one other boy in the room, but Tom said nothing about him. He was not a pleasant-looking boy. Mike wondered why Tom didn't tell him his name. So he asked for it.

"Who's he?" he said, nodding his head towards the boy, who was unpacking his things with rather a sullen face.

"That's Hugh," said Tom, but he said no more.

Hugh looked up. "Go on, say what you like about me," he said. "The new boy will soon know it, anyway! Be funny at my expense if you want to!"

"I don't want to," said Tom.

"Well, I'll tell him then," said the boy. "I'm a cheat! I cheated in the exams last term, and everyone knows it because Tom found it out and gave me away!"

"I didn't give you away," said Tom. "I've told you that before. I saw that you were cheating, and said nothing. But Miss Thomas found it out herself. Anyway, let's drop the subject of cheating this term. Cheat all you like. I don't care!"

Tom turned his back on Hugh. Mike felt very awkward. He wished he hadn't asked for the boy's name. Eric began to talk about the summer holidays and all he had done. Soon the others joined in, and when Hugh slipped out of the room no one saw him go.

"It should be about tea-time now," said Tom, pulling out his watch. "Golly, no it isn't! Half an hour to go still! My word, what a swizz!"

Just then the tea-bell rang loudly, and Tom looked astonished. Mike laughed. "Don't you remember?" he said. "Mr. Wills put your watch back half an hour?"

"So he did!" said Tom, looking relieved. He altered his watch again. "Well, come on," he said. "I could eat a mountain if only it was made of cake! Bring your tuck-box. What have you got in it? I'll share mine with you if you'll share yours with me. I've got a simply GORGEOUS chocolate cake."

It was fun, that first meal. All the children had brought goodies back in their tuck-boxes. They shared with one another, and the most enormous teas were eaten that day! Janet went to sit with Mike, and the two of them gave away part of all their cakes. In exchange they got slices of all kinds of other cakes. By the time they got up from the tea-table they couldn't eat another crumb!

"I hope we don't have to have supper!" said Mike. "I feel as if I don't want to eat again for a fortnight. But wasn't it scrumptious!"

The children had to go and see the headmaster and headmistress after tea. Both were grey-haired, and had kindly but rather stern faces. Mike and Janet felt very nervous and could hardly answer the questions they were asked.

"You will both be in the same form at first," said the headmaster, Mr. Quentin. "Janet is a year younger, but I hear that she is advanced for her age. You will be in the second form."

"Yes, sir," said the children.

"We work hard at St. Rollo's," said Miss Lesley, the headmistress. "But we play hard too. So you should have a good time and enjoy every day of the term. Remember our motto always, won't you: 'Not the least that we dare, but the most that we can!' "

"Yes, we will," said the two children.

"St. Rollo's does all it can for its children," said Miss Lesley, "so it's up to you to do all you can for your school, too. You may go."

The children went. "I like the heads, don't you, Mike?" said Janet. "But I'm a bit afraid of them too. I shouldn't like to be sent to them for punishment."

"I bet Tom has!" said Mike. "Now we've got to go and see Miss Thomas. Come on."

Miss Thomas was in their classroom, making out lists. She looked up as the two children came in.

"Well, Michael; well, Janet!" she said, with a smile. "Finding your way round a bit? It's difficult at first, isn't it? I've got your last reports here, and they are quite good. I hope you will do as well for me as you seem to have done for your last form-mistress!"

"We'll try," said the children, liking Miss Thomas's broad smile and brown eyes.

"I'm bad at maths," said Janet.

"And my handwriting is pretty awful," said Michael.

"Well, we'll see what we can do about it," said Miss Thomas. "Now you can go back to the common-room with the others. You'll know it by the perfectly terrible noise that comes out of the door!"

The children laughed and went out of the room. "I think I'm going to like St. Rollo's awfully," said Janet happily.

"Everybody is so nice. The girls in my dorm are fine, Mike. Do you like the boys in yours?"

"Yes, all except a boy called Hugh," said Mike, and he told Janet about the sulky boy. "I say—is this our common-room, do you think?"

They had come to an open door, out of which came a medley of noises. A gramophone was going, and someone was singing loudly to it, rather out of tune. Two or three others were shouting about something and another boy was hammering on the floor, though why, Janet and Mike couldn't imagine. They put their heads in at the door.

"This can't be our common-room," said Mike. "The children all look too big."

"Get out of here, tiddlers!" yelled the boy who was hammering on the floor. "You don't belong here! Find the kindergarten!"

"What cheek!" said Janet indignantly, as they withdrew their heads and walked off down the passage. "Tiddlers, indeed!"

Round the next passage was a noise that was positively deafening. It came from a big room on the left. A wireless was going full-tilt, and a gramophone, too, so that neither of them could be heard properly. Four or five children seemed to be having a fight on the floor, and a few others were yelling to them, telling them to "Go it!" and "Stick it!"

A cushion flew through the air and hit Janet on the shoulder. She threw it back. A girl raised her voice dolefully.

"Oh, do shut up! I want to hear the wireless!"

Nobody took any notice. The girl shouted even more loudly: "I say, I WANT TO HEAR THE WIRELESS."

Somebody snapped off the gramophone, and the wireless seemed to boom out even more loudly. There was dance music on it.

"Let's dance!" cried Fred, fox-trotting by, holding a cushion as if it were a partner. "Hallo, Mike, hallo Janet. Where on earth have you been? Come into our quiet, peaceful room, won't you? Don't stand at the door looking like two scared mice."

So into their common-room went the two children, at first quite scared of all the noise around them. But gradually they got used to it, and picked out the voices of the boys and girls they knew, talking, shouting, and laughing together. It was fun. It felt good to be there all together like a big, happy family. The noise was nice too.

For an hour the noise went on, and then died down as the children became tired. Books were got out, and puzzles. The wireless was turned down a little. The supper-bell went, and the children trooped down into the dining-hall. The first day was nearly over. A quiet hour after supper, and then bed. Yes—it was going to be nice at St. Rollo's!

CHAPTER 3

A HAPPY TIME

Michael and Janet found things rather strange at first, but after two or three days St. Rollo's began to seem quite familiar to them. They knew their way about by then—though poor Janet got quite lost the second day, looking for her classroom!

She opened the door of what she thought was her form-room—only to find a class of big boys and girls taking painting! They sat round the room with their drawing-boards in front of them, earnestly drawing or painting a vase of bright leaves.

"Hallo! What do you want?" asked the drawing-master.

"I wanted the second form classroom," said Janet, blushing red.

"Oh well, this isn't it," said the master. "Go down the stairs, turn to the right—and it's the first door."

"Thank you," said Janet, thinking how silly she was not to remember what floor her classroom was on. She ran down the stairs, and tried to remember if the drawing-master had said turn to the left or to the right.

"I think he said left," said Janet to herself. So to the left she turned and opened the first door there. To her horror, it was the door of the junior mistresses' common-room! One or two of them sat there, making out time-tables.

"What is it?" said the nearest one.

"Nothing," said Janet, going red again. "I'm looking for my classroom—the second form. I keep going into the wrong room."

"Oh, you're a new girl, aren't you?" said the mistress, with a laugh. "Well, go along the passage and take the first door on the right."

So at last Janet found her classroom, and was very relieved. But when three or four days had gone by she couldn't imagine how she could have made such a mistake! The school building, big as it was, was beginning to be very familiar to her.

The second form settled down well. Janet and Mike were the only new children in it. Miss Thomas let them keep the desks they had chosen—but she looked with a doubtful eye on Tom, when he sat down at the desk in the back row, next to Janet.

"Oh," she said, "so you've chosen a desk in the back row again, Tom. Do you think it's worth while doing that? You know quite well that before a week has gone by you will be told to take a desk out here in front, where I can keep my eye on you."

"Oh, Miss Thomas!" said Tom. "I'm turning over a new leaf this term. Really I am. Let me keep this desk. I'm trying to help the new children, so I'm sitting by them."

"I see," said Miss Thomas, who looked as if she didn't believe a word that Tom said. "Well—I give you not more than a week there, Tom! We'll just see!"

There were a good many children in Mike's form. Mike and Janet soon got to know them all. They were a jolly lot, cheerful and full of fun—except for the boy called Hugh, who hardly spoke to anyone and seemed very sullen.

Tom was a great favourite. He made the silliest jokes, played countless tricks, and yet was always ready to help anyone. The teachers liked him, though they were forever scolding him for his careless work.

"It isn't necessary for you to be bottom of *every* subject, *every* week, is it, Tom?" said Miss Thomas. "I mean—wouldn't you like to give me a nice surprise and be top in something just for once?"

"Oh, Miss Thomas—would it really give you a nice surprise?" said Tom. "Wouldn't it give you a shock, not a surprise! I wouldn't like to give you a shock."

“Considering that you spend half your time thinking out tricks to shock people, that’s a foolish remark!” said Miss Thomas. “Now, open your books at page 19.”

Janet and Mike found the work to be about the same as they had been used to. They both had brains, and it was not difficult for them to keep up with the others. In fact, Janet felt sure that, if she tried very hard, she could be top of the form! She had a wonderful memory, and couldn’t seem to forget anything she had read or heard. This was a great gift, for it made all lessons easy for her.

Doris, the girl with glasses, was easily top each week. Nothing seemed difficult to her. Even the hot-tempered French master beamed on Doris and praised her—though he seldom praised anyone else. Mike and Janet were quite scared of him.

“Monsieur Crozier looked as if he was going to box my ears this morning!” said Janet to Mike. “Don’t you think he did!”

“He will rap your knuckles with a ruler if you give him the slightest chance!” said Tom, with a grin. “He rapped mine so hard last term that I almost jumped out of my skin. I just got back into it in time.”

“Idiot!” said Mike. “I bet you had played some sort of trick on him.”

“He had,” said Fred. “He put white paint on that front lock of his hair—and when Monsieur Crozier exclaimed about it, what do you suppose Tom said?”

“What?” said Janet and Mike together.

“He said, ‘Monsieur Crozier, my hair is turning white with the effort of learning the French verbs you have given us this week’,” said Fred. “And do you wonder he got his knuckles rapped after that?”

“I’ll think out something to make old Monsieur sit up!” said Tom. “You wait and see!”

“Oh, hurry up, then,” begged the children around.

A week or two passed by, and Mike and Janet settled down well. They loved everything. The work was not too difficult for them. The teachers were jolly. Hockey was marvellous. This was played three times a week, and everyone was expected to turn up. Gym was fine too. Mike and Janet were good at this, and enjoyed the half-hours in the big gym with the others.

There were lovely walks around the school. The children were allowed to go for walks by themselves, providing that three or more of them went together. So it was natural that Tom, Mike and Janet should often go together. The other children made up threes too, and went off for an hour or so when they could. It was lovely on the hills around, and already the children were looking for ripe blackberries and peering at the nut trees to see if there were going to be many nuts.

“Doesn’t Hugh ever go for a walk?” said Janet once, when she, Mike and Tom had come in from a lovely sunny walk, to find Hugh bent double over a book in a far corner of the common-room. He was alone. All the other children were out doing something—either practising hockey on the field, or gardening, or walking.

“Well, you have to be at least three to go for a walk,” said Tom in a low voice. “And no one ever asks Hugh, of course—and he wouldn’t like to ask two others because he’d be pretty certain they’d say No.”

“Why does everyone dislike him so?” asked Janet. “He would be quite a nice-looking boy if only he didn’t look so surly.”

“He was new last term,” said Tom. “He’s not very clever, but he’s an awful swot—mugs up all sorts of things, and always has his nose in a book. Won’t join in things, you know. And when he cheated at the exams last term, that was the last straw. Nobody decent wanted to have anything to do with him.”

"He can't be very happy," said Janet, who was a kind-hearted girl, willing to be friends with anyone.

"Perhaps he doesn't deserve to be," said Tom.

"But even if you don't deserve to be happy, it must be horrid never to be," argued Janet.

"Oh, don't start being a ministering angel, Janet," said Mike impatiently. "Don't you remember how sorry you were for that spiteful dog next door, who was always being whipped for chasing hens? Well, what happened when you went out of your way to be kind to him, because you thought he must be miserable? He snapped at you, and nearly took your finger off!"

"I know," said Janet. "But that was only because he couldn't understand anyone being kind to him."

"Well, Hugh would certainly snap your head off if you tried any kind words on *him*," said Tom, with a laugh. "Look out—here he comes."

The children fell silent as Hugh got up from his seat and made his way to the door. He had to pass the three on his way, and he looked at them sneeringly.

"Talking about me, I suppose?" he said. "Funny how everyone stops talking when I come near!"

He bumped rudely into Janet as he passed and sent her against the wall. The two boys leapt at Hugh, but he was gone before they could hold him.

"Well, do you feel like going after him and being sweet?" said Tom to Janet. She shook her head. She thought Hugh was horrid. But all the same she was sorry for him.

Mike and Janet wrote long letters to their mother and father. "We're awfully glad we came to St. Rollo's," wrote Mike. "It's such fun to be with boys and girls together, and as Janet is in my form, we are as much together as ever we were. I shouldn't be surprised if she's top one week. The hockey is lovely. I'm good at it. Do send us some chocolate, if you can."

His mother and father smiled at his letters and Janet's. They could see that the two children were happy at the school they had chosen for them and they were glad.

"St. Rollo's is fine," wrote Janet. "I *am* glad we came here. We do have fun!"

They certainly did—and they meant to have even more fun very soon!

CHAPTER 4

TOM IS UP TO TRICKS

Tom was always up to tricks. He knew all the usual ones, of course—the trick of covering a bit of paper with ink one side, and handing it to someone as if it were a note—and then, when they took it they found their fingers all inky! He knew all the different ways of making paper darts. He knew how to flip a pellet of paper from underneath his desk so that it would land exactly where he wanted it. There was nothing that Tom didn't know, when it came to tricks!

He lasted just four days in his desk at the back. Then Miss Thomas put him well in the front!

"I thought you wouldn't last a week at the back there," she said. "I feel much more comfortable with you just under my eye! Ah—that's better. Now I think you will find it quite difficult to fire off your paper pellets at children who are really trying to work."

The trick that had made Miss Thomas move him had caused the class a good deal of merriment. Miss Thomas had written history questions on the board for the form to answer in writing. Janet was hard at work answering them, for she wanted to get good marks, and Mike was working well too.

Suddenly Janet felt a nudge. She looked up. Tom had already finished answering the questions, though Janet felt certain that he had put "I don't know" to some of them! Tom nodded his head towards the window.

Janet looked there. Just outside was one of the gardeners, hard at work in a bed. He was a large man, red-faced, with a very big nose.

"What about giving old Nosey a shock?" said Tom, opening his desk to speak behind it. Janet nodded gleefully.

She didn't know what Tom meant to do, but she was sure it would be funny.

Tom hunted in his desk till he found what he wanted. It was a piece of clay. The boy shut his desk and warmed the clay in his hands below it. It soon became soft and he picked off pieces to make hard pellets.

Janet and Mike watched him. Miss Thomas looked up. "Janet! Michael! Tom! Have you all finished your history questions? Then get out your text-book and learn the list of answers on page 23."

The children got out their books. Tom winked at Janet. He waited until Miss Thomas was standing at Fred's desk, with her back turned to him, and then, very deftly, he flicked the clay pellet out of the open window with his thumb.

It hit the gardener on the top of his hat. He thought something had fallen on him from above and he stood up, raising his head to the sky, as if he thought it must be raining. Janet gave a muffled giggle.

"Shut up," whispered Tom. He waited till the man had bent down again, and his big nose presented a fine target. Flick! A big pellet flew straight out of the window—and this time it hit the astonished man right on the tip of his nose, with a smart tap.

He stood up straight, rubbing his nose, glaring into the window. But all he saw were bent heads and innocent faces, though one little girl was certainly smiling very broadly to herself. That was Janet, of course. She simply could *not* keep her mouth from smiling!

The gardener muttered something to himself, glared at the bent heads, and bent over his work again. Tom waited his chance and neatly flicked out another pellet. It hit the man smartly on the cheek, and he gave a cry of pain.

All the children looked up. Miss Thomas gazed in surprise at the open window, outside which the gardener was standing.

“Now, look here!” said the angry man, staring in at the window. “Which of you did that? Hitting me in the face with peas or something! Where’s your teacher?”

“I’m here,” said Miss Thomas. “What is the matter? I don’t think any of the children here have been playing tricks. You must have made a mistake. Please don’t disturb the class.”

“Made a mistake! Do you suppose I don’t know when anyone is flicking peas or something at me?” said the gardener. He glared at Janet, who was giggling. “Yes—and that’s the girl who did it, too, if you ask *me*! She was giggling to herself before—and I’m pretty certain I saw her doing it.”

“That will do, gardener,” said Miss Thomas. “I will deal with the matter myself. I am sorry you have been hindered in your work.”

She shut down the window. The man went off, grumbling. Miss Thomas looked at Janet, who was very red.

“Kindly leave the gardeners to do their work, Janet,” she said in a cold voice. “Bring your things out of your desk, and put them in the empty front one. You had better sit there, I think.”

Janet didn’t know what to say. She couldn’t give Tom away, and if she said she hadn’t done it, Miss Thomas would ask who did, and then Tom would get into trouble. So with a lip that quivered, Janet opened her desk and began to get out her things.

Tom spoke up at once. “It wasn’t Janet,” he said. “I did it. I didn’t like the look of the gardener’s nose—so I just hit it with a clay pellet or two, Miss Thomas. I’m sure you would have liked to do it yourself, Miss Thomas, if you had seen that big nose out there.”

Everyone choked with laughter. Miss Thomas didn’t even smile. She looked straight at Tom with cold eyes.

“I hope my manners are better than yours,” she said. “If not, I don’t know what I should feel inclined to do to you,

Tom Young. Bring your things out here, please. You will be under my eye in future."

So, with many soft groans, Tom left his seat at the back beside Janet, and went to the front.

"Oh, what a pity," said Janet, later on, as the class was waiting for Monsieur Crozier to come. "Now you won't be able to do any more tricks, Tom. You're right at the front."

"Goodness, you don't think that will stop Tom, do you?" said Fred. And Fred was right. It didn't!

Monsieur Crozier was not a very good person to play about with, because he had such a hot temper. The class never knew how he was going to take a joke. Sometimes, if Tom or Marian said something sharp, he would throw back his grey head and roar with laughter. Yet at other times he could not see a joke at all, but would fly into a temper.

Few people dared to play tricks on the French master, but Tom, of course, didn't care what he did. One morning, Janet and Mike found him kneeling down in a far corner of the room, behind the teacher's desk. In this corner stood two or three rolled-up maps. Tom was hiding something behind the maps.

"Whatever are you doing?" asked Janet in surprise. Tom grinned.

"Preparing a little surprise packet for dear Monsieur Crozier," he said.

"What is it?" said Mike, peering down.

"Quite simple," said Tom. "Look—I've got two empty cotton-reels here—and I've tied thin black thread to each. If you follow the thread you'll see it runs behind this cupboard—behind that book-case, over the hot-water pipe, and up to my desk. Now, what will happen when I pull the threads?"

"The cotton-reels will dance in their corner!" giggled Janet, "and Monsieur Crozier won't know what the noise is—because over here is far from where anyone sits! What fun!"

Mike told everyone what was going to happen. It was a small trick but might be very funny. The whole class was

thrilled. In the French lesson that day they were to recite their French verbs, which was a very dull thing to do. Now it looked as if the lesson wouldn't be so dull after all.

Monsieur Crozier came into the room, his spectacles on his nose. His thick hair was untidy. It was plain that he had been in a temper with somebody, for it was his habit to ruffle his hair whenever he was angry. It stood up well, and the class smiled to see it.

"*Asseyez-vous!*" rapped out Monsieur Crozier, and the class sat down at once. In clear French sentences the master told them what he expected of them. Each child was to stand in turn and recite the French verb he had been told to learn, and the others were to write them out.

"And this morning I expect HARD WORK!" said the French master. "I have had disgraceful work from the third form—disgrrrrrrrraceful! I will not put up with the same thing from you. You understand?"

"Yes, Monsieur Crozier," chanted the class. Monsieur Crozier looked at Tom, who had on a most innocent expression that morning.

"And you, too, will work!" he said. "It is not necessary always to be bottom. If you had no brains I would say 'Ah, the poor boy—he cannot work!' But you have brains and you will not use them. That is bad, very bad."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. Monsieur Crozier gave a grunt and sat down. Fred stood up to recite his verbs. The rest of the class bent over their desks to write them.

They were all listening for Tom to begin his trick. He did nothing at first, but waited until Fred had sat down. There was silence for a moment, whilst the French master marked Fred's name in his book.

Then Tom pulled at the threads which ran to his desk. At once the cotton-reels over in the far corner began to jiggle like mad. Jiggle, jiggle, jiggle! they went. Jiggle, jiggle, jiggle!

Monsieur Crozier looked up, puzzled. He didn't quite know where the noise came from. He stared round the quiet class. Everyone's head was bent low, for most of the children were trying to hide their smiles. Janet felt a giggle coming and she shut her mouth hard. She was a terrible giggler. Mike looked at her anxiously. Janet so often gave the game away by exploding into a tremendous laugh.

The noise stopped. Doris stood up to say her verbs. She was quite perfect in them. She sat down. Monsieur Crozier marked her name. Tom pulled at the threads and the cotton reels jerked madly about behind the maps.

"What is that noise?" said the master impatiently, looking round. "Who makes that noise?"

"What noise, sir?" asked Tom innocently. "Is there a noise? I heard an aeroplane pass over just now."

"An aeroplane does not make a noise in this room!" said the master. "It is a jiggling noise. Who is doing it?"

"A jiggling noise, sir?" said Mike, looking surprised. "What sort of jiggling noise? My desk is a bit wobbly, sir—perhaps it's that you heard?"

Mike wobbled his desk and made a terrific noise. Everyone laughed.

"Enough!" cried Monsieur Crozier, rapidly losing his temper. "It is not your desk I mean. Silence! We will listen for the noise together."

There was a dead silence. Tom did not pull the threads. There was no noise at all.

But as soon as Eric was standing up, reciting his verbs in his soft voice, Tom jerked hard at his threads, and the reels did a kind of fox-trot behind the maps, sounding quite loud on the boards.

"There is that noise again!" said the master angrily. "Silence, Eric. Listen!"

Tom could not resist making the reels dance again as everyone listened. Jiggle-jiggle-jiggle-tap-tap-tap-jiggle-jiggle they went, and the class began to giggle.

"It comes from behind those maps," said the French master, puzzled. "It is very strange."

"Mice perhaps, sir," said Mike. Tom flashed him a grin. Mike was playing up well.

The French master did not like mice. He stared at the maps, annoyed. He did not see how the noise could possibly be a trick, for the maps were far from any child's desk.

"Shall I see, sir?" asked Tom, getting up. "I don't mind mice a bit. I think Mike may be right, sir. It certainly does sound like a mouse caught behind there. Shall I look, sir?"

Now, what Tom thought he would do was to look behind the maps, pocket the reels quickly after pulling the threads away, and then announce that there was no mouse there. But when he got to the corner, he couldn't resist carrying the trick a bit further.

"I'll pretend there really *is* a mouse!" he thought. "That'll give the class a real bit of fun!"

So, when he knelt down and fiddled about behind the maps, pulling away the threads and getting hold of the cotton-reels, he suddenly gave a yell that made everyone jump, even the French master.

"It's a mouse! It's a mouse! Come here, you bad little thing! Sir, it's a mouse!"

The class knew perfectly well it wasn't. Janet gave a loud, explosive giggle that she tried hastily to turn into a cough. Even the surly Hugh smiled.

Tom knocked over all the maps, pretending to get the mouse. Then he made it seem as if the little creature had run into the classroom, and he jumped and bounded after the imaginary mouse, crawling under desks and nearly pulling a small table on top of him. The whole class exploded into a gale of laughter that drowned Monsieur Crozier's angry voice.

"Come here, you!" yelled Tom, thoroughly enjoying himself. "Ah—got you! No, I haven't! Just touched your tail. Ah, there you are again. Whoops! Nearly got you that time.

What a mouse! Oh, what a mouse! Whoops, there you go again!”

Mike got out of his desk to join him. The two boys capered about on hands and knees and nearly drove Monsieur Crozier mad. He hammered on his desk. But it was quite impossible for the class to be silent. They laughed till their sides ached.

And in the middle of it all Miss Thomas walked in, furious! She had been taking the class next door, and could not imagine what all the noise was. She had felt certain that no teacher was with the second form. She stopped in surprise when she saw Monsieur Crozier there, red in the face with fury.

The class stopped giggling when they saw Miss Thomas. She had a way of giving out rather unpleasant punishments, and the class somehow felt that she would not readily believe in their mouse.

“I’m sorry, Monsieur Crozier,” said Miss Thomas. “I thought you couldn’t be here.”

“Miss Thomas, I dislike your class,” said Monsieur Crozier, quite as ready to fly into a temper with Miss Thomas as with the children. “They are ill-disciplined, ill-behaved, ill-mannered. See how they chase a mouse round your classroom! Ah, the bad children!”

“A mouse!” said Miss Thomas, in the utmost surprise. “But how could that be? There are no mice in the school. The school cats see to that. Has anyone got a tame mouse then?”

“No, Miss Thomas,” chorused the children together.

“We heard a noise behind the maps,” began Tom—but Miss Thomas silenced him with a look.

“Oh, you did, did you?” she said. “You may as well know that I don’t believe in your mouse, Tom. I will speak to you all at the beginning of the next lesson. Pardon me for coming in like this, Monsieur Crozier. I apologise also for my class.”

The class felt a little subdued. The French master glared at them, and proceeded to give them so much homework that they would have groaned if they had dared. Tom got a rap on his knuckles when he opened his mouth to protest. After that, he said no more. Monsieur Crozier was dangerous when he got as far as knuckle-rapping!

Miss Thomas was very sarcastic about the whole affair when she next saw her class. She flatly refused to believe in the mouse, but instead, asked who had gone to examine the noise in the corner.

"I did," said Tom, who always owned up to anything, quite fearlessly.

"I thought so," said Miss Thomas. "Well, you will write me an essay, four pages long, on the habits of mice, Tom. Give it to me this evening."

"But Miss Thomas," began Tom, "you know it's the hockey-match this afternoon, and we're all watching it, and after tea there's a concert."

"That doesn't interest me at all," said Miss Thomas. "What interests me intensely at the moment is the habits of mice, and that being so, I insist on having that essay by seven o'clock. Not another word, Tom, unless you also want to write me an essay on, let us say, cotton reels. I am not quite so innocent as Monsieur Crozier."

After that there was no more to be said. Mike and Janet gave up watching the hockey match in order to help Tom with his essay. Mike looked up the habits of mice, and Janet looked up the spelling of the words. With many groans and sighs Tom managed to write four pages in his largest handwriting by seven o'clock. "It *is* decent of you to help," he said gratefully.

"Well, we shared the fun, didn't we?" said Mike. "So we must share the punishment too!"

CHAPTER 5

AN EXCITING IDEA

In the middle of that term Mike's birthday came. He was very much looking forward to it because he knew he would have plenty of presents sent to him, and he hoped his mother would let him have a fine birthday cake.

"I hope it won't be broken in pieces before it arrives," he said to Janet. "You know, Fred had a birthday last term, and he said his cake came in crumbs, and they had to eat it with a spoon. I'd better warn Mother to pack it very carefully."

But Mother didn't risk packing one. She wrote to Mike and told him to order himself a cake from the big cake shop in the town nearby. "And if you would like to give a small party to your own special friends, do so," she said. "You can order what you like in the way of food and drink, and tell the shop to send me the bill. I can trust you not to be too extravagant, I know. Have a good time, and be sure your birthday cake has lots of icing on."

Mike was delighted. He showed the letter to Tom. "Isn't Mother decent?" he said. "Can you come down to the town with Janet and me to-day, Tom, and help me to order things?"

"You're not going to ask all the boys and girls in the class to share your party, are you?" said Tom. "You know, that would cost your mother a small fortune."

"Would it?" said Mike. "Well—what shall I do, then? How shall I choose people without making the ones left out feel hurt?"

"Well, if I were you, I'd just ask the boys in your own dormitory, and the girls in Janet's," said Tom. "That will be quite enough children."

“Yes, that’s a good idea,” said Mike, pleased. “I wish we could have our party in a separate room, so that the others we haven’t asked won’t have to see us eating the birthday cake and the other things. That would make me feel rather mean.”

“Well, listen,” said Tom, looking excited. “Why not have a midnight feast? We haven’t had one for two terms. It’s about time we did.”

“A midnight feast!” said Janet, her eyes nearly popping out of her head. “Oooh, that would be marvellous. I’ve read about them in books. Oh Mike, *do* let’s have your party in the middle of the night. Do, do!”

Mike didn’t need much pressing. He was just as keen on the idea as Janet and Tom! The three of them began to talk excitedly about what they would do.

“Shall we have it in one of our dormitories?” said Janet. “Either yours or mine, Mike?”

“No,” said Tom at once. “Mr. Wills sleeps in the room next to ours—and Miss Thomas sleeps in the room next to yours, Janet. Either of them might hear us making a noise and come and find us.”

“We needn’t make a noise,” said Janet. “We could just eat and drink.”

“Janet! You couldn’t possibly last an hour or two without going off into one of your giggling fits, you know you couldn’t,” said Mike. “And you make an awful noise with your first giggle. It’s like an explosion.”

“I know,” said Janet. “I can’t help it. I smother it till I almost burst—and then it comes out all of a sudden. Well—if we don’t have the feast in one of our dormitories, where *shall* we have it?”

They all thought hard. Then Tom gave a grin. “I know the very place. What about the gardeners’ shed?”

“The gardeners’ shed!” said Mike and Janet together. “But why there?”

“Well, because it’s out of the school and we can make a noise,” said Tom. “And because it’s not far from the little side-door we use when we go to the playing-fields. We can easily slip down and open it to go out. And also, it would be a fine place to store the food in. We can put it into boxes and cover them with sacks.”

“Yes—it does sound rather good,” said Mike. “It would be marvellous to be out of the school building, because I’m sure we’d make a noise.”

“Last time we had a midnight feast, we had it in a dormitory,” said Tom. “And in the middle someone dropped a ginger-beer bottle. We got so frightened at the noise that we all hopped into bed, and the feast was spoilt. If we hold ours in the shed, we shan’t be afraid of anyone coming. Let’s!”

So it was decided to hold it there. Then the next excitement was going down to the town to buy the food.

They went to the big cake shop first. Mike said what he wanted. “I want a big birthday cake made,” he said.

“Enough for about twelve people, please. And I want it to be covered with pink icing, and written on it in white I’d like ‘A happy birthday.’ Can you do that?”

“Certainly,” said the shopgirl, and wrote down Mike’s name, and his mother’s address, so that she might send her the bill. Then Mike turned to the others. “What else shall we have?” he said. “You help me to choose.”

So Janet and Tom obligingly helped him, and between them they chose chocolate cakes, biscuits, shortbread and currant buns. Then they went to the grocer and asked for tinned sweetened milk, which everyone loved, sardines, tinned pineapple, and bottles of ginger-beer.

The shop promised to pack up the goods and have them ready for the children to collect on the morning of Mike’s birthday. The children meant to go down immediately after morning school and fetch the things.

They felt very excited. Janet and Mike counted up the cakes and things they had ordered and felt sure they had

bought enough to feed everyone very well indeed.

"And now we'll have to ask everyone," said Mike happily. "Isn't it fun to invite people, Janet?"

"I'll ask the girls in my dorm to-night," said Janet. "The rest of the class won't be there then, so they won't know. I vote we don't tell anyone except our guests that we're going to have a feast. We don't want it to get to the ears of any of the teachers. Tell the boys in your dorm to keep it quiet, Mike."

"Right," said Mike. Then he frowned. "I say, Janet," he said, "what about Hugh? Are we to ask him?"

Janet stared at Mike. She didn't know what to say. "Well, I suppose we'd better," she said at last. "It would be rather awful to leave him out as he belongs to your dormitory. No one likes him—but still he'd feel simply awful if he knew we were having a feast and he hadn't been asked."

"All right," said Mike. "I'll ask him. But he's such a surly fellow that he'll be an awful wet blanket."

Tom agreed that Hugh must be asked too. "I don't want him," he said, "but, after all, he belongs to our dorm, and it would make him feel pretty dreadful to be left out when everyone else is going."

So Mike quite meant to ask Hugh too. But then, something happened to make him change his mind. It had to do with Tom, and it happened in Mr. Wills's class.

Mr. Wills was taking maths with the second form. Tom was bored. He hated maths, and seldom got a sum right. Mr. Wills had almost given him up. So long as Tom sat quietly at his desk and didn't disturb the others, Mr. Wills left him in peace. But if Tom got up to any tricks Mr. Wills pounced on him.

Tom usually behaved himself in the maths class, for he respected Mr. Wills, and knew that he would stand no nonsense. But that morning he was restless. He had slept very well the night before and was so full of beans that he

could hardly sit still. He had prepared a trick for the French master in the next lesson, and was longing to play it.

The trick was one of his string tricks. He was marvellous at those. He had slipped into the classroom before school that morning and had neatly tied strong yellow thread to the pegs that held the blackboard on its easel. A jerk at the thread, and a peg would come out—and down would crash the blackboard!

Tom looked at Mr. Wills. Mr. Wills caught his eye and frowned. “Get on, Tom,” he said. “Don’t slack so. If you can’t get a sum right, get it wrong. Then, at least, I shall know you’ve been doing something!”

“Yes, Mr. Wills,” said Tom meekly. He scribbled down a few figures that meant nothing at all. His hand itched to pull away the peg. As his desk was at the front, he could easily leap forward and pick up the peg before Mr. Wills could see that string was tied to it.

“It’s a bit dangerous to try it on with Mr. Wills,” thought Tom. “But I’m so bored I must do something!”

He turned round and caught Mike’s eye. Mike winked. Tom winked back. Then he winked twice with each eye in turn. That was his signal to Mike that a trick was about to be played! Mike nudged Janet. They both looked up eagerly. Hugh caught their eager looks and wondered what was up. He guessed that Tom was about to play a trick and he watched him.

Mr. Wills was at the back of the room, looking at Bertha’s work. Tom jerked his thread. The peg of the easel flew out—one side of the blackboard slipped down—and then it fell with a resounding crash on to the floor, making everyone jump violently. Mike and Janet knew what had happened, and they tried not to laugh. Hugh also saw what had happened. Before anyone could do anything Tom was out of his desk in a flash, and had picked up the blackboard and peg and set them back in place. He wondered whether or

not to remove the threads, but decided he would risk it again.

“Thank you, Tom,” said Mr. Wills, who hadn’t for a moment guessed that it was a trick. “Get on with your work, everybody.”

Most of the children guessed that it was Tom up to his tricks again. They watched to see if it would happen once more. Mr. Wills went to see Hugh’s work. He had done most of his sums wrong, and the master grumbled at him.

“You haven’t been trying! What have you been thinking of to put down this sum like that! No one else in the class has so many sums wrong!”

Hugh flushed. He always hated being grumbled at in front of anyone. “I’m sure Tom has more sums wrong than I have,” he said, in a low voice.

At that moment Tom jerked the two pegs neatly out of the easel, and the board fell suddenly, with an even greater crash than before. Everyone giggled, and Janet gave one of her explosions. The noise she made caused the children to laugh even more loudly.

“What’s the matter with the board this morning?” said Mr. Wills irritably.

“I should think Tom has something to do with it,” said Hugh spitefully. “You’ll find he hasn’t got a single sum right—and has given all his attention to our blackboard instead. I have at least been working!”

There was a silence. Mr. Wills went to the blackboard. He examined the pegs. But they now had no thread on them, for Tom had slipped it off and it was safely in his pockets.

But not very safely, after all! Mr. Wills turned to Tom. “Just turn out your pockets, please,” he ordered. Tom obeyed promptly—and there on the desk lay the tell-tale yellow thread, still with the little slip-knots at one end.

“I’ll see you after the class, Tom,” said Mr. Wills. “I can’t make you do good work—but I can at least stop you from

preventing the others from working. You should know by now that I don't stand any nonsense in my classes."

"Yes, sir," said Tom dolefully.

"Maths is a most important subject," went on Mr. Wills. "Some of the children here are working for scholarships and it is necessary they should get on well this term. If you disturb my classes once more I shall refuse to have you in them."

"Yes, sir," said Tom again, going red. Mr. Wills had a very rough tongue. When the master had turned his back on the class to write something on the now steady blackboard, Tom turned round to get the comfort of a look from Mike and Janet. They nodded at him—and then Tom caught sight of Hugh's face.

Hugh wore a spiteful grin on his face. He was pleased to have got Tom into trouble.

"Sneak!" whispered Mike to Hugh.

"SILENCE!" said Mr. Wills, not turning round. Mike said no more, but gave Hugh a look that said all his tongue longed to say!

"Wait till after school!" said the look. "Just wait till after school."

CHAPTER 6

MIDNIGHT FEAST!

Tom got a tremendous scolding after the class, and entered the French class four minutes late, with a very red face. Monsieur Crozier looked at him in surprise.

"And why are you late?" he said. "It is not the custom to walk into my classes after they have started."

"Please, sir, I'm sorry," said Tom, "but Mr. Wills was talking to me."

The French master guessed that Tom had been up for a scolding, and he said no more. Tom was very subdued that lesson. Mr. Wills had said some cutting things to him, and the boy felt rather ashamed of himself. It was all very well to play tricks and have a good time—but there *was* work to do as well! So he sat like a lamb in the French class, and really listened to the lesson.

After school, Mike, Janet and Fred went after Hugh. "Sneak!" said Mike furiously. "What did you want to go and give Tom away for?"

"Why shouldn't I?" said Hugh. "He sneaked on me last term."

"No, he didn't," said Mike. "He says he didn't—and you know as well as anybody that Tom's truthful. He doesn't tell lies. You're a beastly sneak!"

"Oh, shut up," said Hugh rudely, and walked off. But the others walked after him, telling him all kinds of truthful but horrid things about himself. Hugh went into a music-room to practise and banged the door on them. He even turned the key in the lock.

"He really is a spiteful sneak," said Janet. "Mike, you're surely not going to ask him to our feast now, are you?"

“You bet I’m not,” said Mike. “As if I’d have a sneaky creature like that on my birthday night! No fear!”

“Well, we’ll ask all the others, and we’ll warn them not to say a word to Hugh,” said Janet. So they asked everyone else—Fred, Eric, small George, Marian, Bertha, Connie, Audrey and Doris. With Mike, Janet and Tom there would be eleven children altogether.

“And don’t say a single word to anyone outside our dormitories,” said Mike. “And don’t say anything to Hugh, either. He’s such a sneak that I’m not asking him. I’m sure if he got to know we were having a feast he’d prowl round and then tell about it! So, not a word, mind!”

Mike’s birthday came. He had a lot of cards and many presents. A good deal of it was money and he meant to spend it in the holidays. His mother and father sent him a new paint-box and pencil-box with his name on them. His grandfather wrote to say that he had bought him a new bicycle. Janet gave him a box of writing-paper and stamps. The others gave him small presents, pencils, rubbers, sweets, and so on. Mike was very happy.

“After school, we’ll pop down with baskets and get all those things,” he said. “We’d better ask one or two of the others to come too. We’ll never be able to carry all the stuff ourselves.”

So Fred and Marian came too, and the five set off with giggles and talk. They came back with all the food and drink, and undid the birthday cake in the gardeners’ shed. It was simply marvellous.

“A happy birthday” was written across it, and the pink icing was thick and not too hard. It was a fine big cake. The children were delighted. Mike put it carefully back into its box.

The gardeners’ shed was a big place. It was piled with boxes, tools, pots, wood and so on. Actually it was not much used, for the gardeners had another, smaller shed they preferred, and they used the big shed mostly as a store-

house. The children soon found a good hiding-place for their food and drink.

There was an enormous old crate, made of wood, at the back of the shed. They put everything into this and then put a board on top. On the board they piled rows of flower pots.

"There," said Mike. "I don't think anyone would guess what is under those pots! Now, let's arrange what we're going to sit on."

There were plenty of boxes and big flower pots. The children pulled them out and arranged them to sit on. "We shall have to pin sacks across the windows," said Mike. "Else the light of our candles will be seen."

"Better do that this evening," said Tom. "It might make people suspicious if they came by and saw sacks across the windows."

So they left the windows uncurtained. There was nothing else they could do except smuggle in a few mugs and plates and spoons. Janet said she could do this with Marian. She knew where the school crockery was kept, and she could easily slip into the big cupboard after handwork that afternoon and get what was needed. They could wash it after the feast and put it back again.

"I think that's everything," said Mike happily. "I say—this is going to be fun, isn't it! Golly, I can hardly wait till to-night!"

"I'll wake the girls in my dorm," said Janet, "and you wake the boys, Mike. Don't wake Hugh by mistake, though!"

Everything went off as planned. Janet fell asleep, but awoke just before midnight. She switched on her torch and looked at her watch. Five minutes to twelve! She slipped out of bed, put on shoes, stockings, vest, under her nightdress, and jersey over it. Then her dressing-gown on top. She woke the other girls one by one, shaking them and whispering into their ears.

"It's time! Wake up! The midnight feast is about to begin!"

The girls awoke, and sat up, thrilled. They began to put on vests and jerseys too. Meanwhile the boys were doing the same thing. Mike had awoken them all, except, of course, Hugh, and in silence they were dressing. They did not dare to whisper, as the girls could, because they were afraid of waking Hugh.

They all crept out of the dormitory, and found the six girls waiting for them in the passage outside. Janet was trying to stop her giggles.

"For goodness' sake don't do one of your explosions till we're out in the shed," said Mike anxiously. So Janet bit her lips together and waited. They all went down the stairs and out of the little side-door. Then across to the big shed. Mike opened the door and everyone filed in. Once the door was shut, the children felt safe and began to talk in loud whispers.

Mike and Tom quickly put sacks across the three windows, and then lighted three candles. Their wavering light made queer shadows in the shed, and everything looked rather mysterious and exciting. The other children watched Mike and Tom go to the box at the back and lift off the flower-pots arranged there.

And then out came the good things to eat and drink! How the children gaped for joy to see them! They all felt terribly hungry, and were pleased to see so much to eat and drink.

Mike set the birthday cake down on a big box. All the children crowded round to look at it. They thought it was marvellous. "We'll cut it the very last thing," said Mike. "And don't forget to wish, everybody, because it's a birthday cake!"

They made a start on sardines and cake. It was a lovely mixture. Then they went on to currant buns and biscuits, pineapple and tinned milk. They chattered in low voices and giggled to their hearts' content. When Fred fell off his box and upset tinned, sticky milk all over himself, there was a

gale of laughter. Fred looked so funny with his legs in the air, and milk dripping all over him!

"Sh! Sh!" said Mike. "Honestly, we'll wake up the whole school! Shut up, Janet! Your giggles make everyone worse still. You just make me want to giggle myself."

"This is the best feast we've ever had," said Tom, helping himself to a large piece of chocolate cake. "Any more ginger-pop, Mike?"

"Yes," said Mike. "Help yourself—and now, what about cutting the grand birthday cake?"

"It looks big enough for the whole school," giggled Marian. "I say—I wish Hugh knew what he was missing! Wouldn't he be wild! I expect he is still sound asleep in his bed."

But Hugh wasn't! He had awakened about half-past twelve, and had turned over to go to sleep again.

And then something strange had struck him. There was something missing in the dormitory. It was quite dark there and the boy could see nothing. But he lay there, half-asleep, wondering what was missing.

Then suddenly he knew. There was no steady breathing to be heard. There was no sound at all. Hugh sat up, alarmed. Why was nobody breathing? That was the usual sound to be heard at night, if anyone woke up. What had happened?

Hugh switched on his torch and got out of bed. He looked round the curtains that separated his cubicle from the next boy's. The bed was empty!

Hugh looked at all the beds. Every one was empty. Then the boy guessed in a flash what was happening.

"It's Mike's birthday—and he's having a midnight party somewhere. The beast! He's asked everyone else, and not me! I bet Janet's dormitory is empty too."

He slipped out to see. It was as he had guessed—quite empty. All the beds were bare, their coverings turned back.

The boy felt angry and hurt. They might have asked him! It was hateful to be left out like this.

“I’m always left out of everything!” he thought, hot tears pricking his eyelids. “Always! Do they think it will make me behave any better to them if they treat me like this! How I hate them! I’ll jolly well spoil their feast for them. That will serve them right!”

CHAPTER 7

A SHOCK FOR THE FEASTERS

Hugh wondered how to spoil the feast. Should he go and knock on Mr. Wills' door and tell him that the dormitories were empty? No—Mr. Wills didn't look too kindly on tale-bearing. Well, then, he had better find out where the children were feasting and spoil it for them.

He looked out of the window, and by a chance he caught sight of a tiny flicker outside. It came from a corner of the big window of the shed. The sack didn't quite cover the glass. Hugh stood and looked at it, wondering where the light came from.

"It's from the big shed," he thought. "So that's where they're feasting. I'll go down and find out!"

Down he went, out of the door, which the children had left open, and into the yard. He went across to the shed, and at once heard the sounds of laughter and whispering inside. He put his eye to the place in the window where the light showed, and saw the scene inside. It was a very merry one.

Empty bottles of ginger-beer lay around. Empty tins stood here and there, and crumbs were all over the place. It was plain that the two dormitories had had a marvellous time. Hugh's heart burned in him. He felt so angry and so miserable that he could almost have gone into the shed and fought every child there!

But he didn't do that. He knew it would be no use. Instead, he took up a large stone and crashed it on to the window! The glass broke at once, with a very loud noise. All the children inside the shed jumped up in fright, their cake falling from their fingers.

"What's that?" said Mike in a panic. "The window is broken. Who did it?"

There was another crash as the second window broke under Hugh's stone. The children were now really afraid. They simply couldn't imagine what was happening.

"The noise will wake everyone up!" cried Mike, in a loud whisper. "Quick, we'd better get back to our dormitories. Leave everything. There isn't time to clear up."

Hugh didn't wait to break the third window. He had seen a light spring up in Mr. Wills' room above and he knew the master would be out to see what was happening before another minute had gone by. So he sped lightly up the stairs, and was in his bed before the door of Mr. Wills' room opened.

The eleven children opened the door of the shed and fled into the school. They went up the stairs and into the passage where their dormitories were—and just as they were passing Mr. Wills' door it opened! Mr. Wills stood there in his dressing-gown, staring in amazement at the procession of white-faced children slipping by.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "What was all that noise?"

The children didn't wait to answer. They fled into their rooms and hopped into bed, half-dressed as they were, shoes and all. Mr. Wills went into the boys' dormitory, switched on the light and looked sternly round. He pulled back the curtains from those cubicles that had them drawn around, and spoke angrily.

"What is the meaning of this? Where have you been? Answer me!"

Nobody answered. The boys were really frightened. Hugh's bed was nearest to Mr. Wills, and the master took hold of Hugh's shoulder, shaking him upright.

"You, boy! Answer me! What have you been doing?"

"Sir, I've been in bed all the evening," said Hugh truthfully. "I don't know what the others have been doing. I wasn't with them."

Mr. Wills glared round at the other beds. "I can see that you are half-dressed," he said in an icy voice. "Get out and undress and then get back into bed. I shall want an explanation of this in the morning. You can tell the girls when you see them, that I shall want them too. It seems to me that this is something the Heads should know about. Now then—quick—out of bed and undress!"

The boys, all but Hugh, got out of bed and took off their jerseys and other things. Mr. Wills told Hugh to get out of bed too.

"But I'm not half-dressed," said Hugh. "I've only got my pyjamas on, sir. I wasn't with the others."

But Mr. Wills wasn't believing anyone at all that night. He made Hugh get out too, and saw that he was in his pyjamas as he said. He did not notice one thing—and that was that Hugh had his shoes on! But Mike noticed it.

He was puzzled. Why should Hugh have his shoes on in bed? That was a funny thing to do, surely. And then the boy suddenly guessed the reason.

"Hugh woke up—saw the beds were empty—put on his shoes and slipped down to find us. It was he who broke the windows, the beast! He's got us all into this trouble!"

But he said nothing then. He would tell the others in the morning. He slipped back into bed and tried to go to sleep.

All the eleven children were worried when the morning came. They couldn't imagine what Mr. Wills was going to do. They soon found out. Mr. Wills had gone to the two Heads, and it was they that the children were to see, not Mr. Wills. This was worse than ever!

"You will go now," said Mr. Wills, after prayers were over. "I don't want to hear any explanations from you. You can tell those to the Heads. But I may as well tell you that I went down into the shed last night and found the remains of your feast, the candles burning—and the windows smashed. I understand the feast part—but why you should smash the windows is beyond me. I am ashamed of you all."

“We didn’t smash . . .” began Mike. But Mr. Wills wouldn’t listen to a word. He waved them all away. Hugh had to go, too, although he kept saying that he hadn’t been with the others. Mike had told the others what he suspected about Hugh, and every boy and girl looked at him with disgust and dislike.

They went to see the Heads. Their knees shook, and Bertha began to cry. Even Janet felt the tears coming. All the children were tired, and some of them had eaten too much and didn’t feel well.

The Heads looked stern. They asked a few questions, and then made Tom tell the whole story.

“I can understand your wanting to have some sort of a party on Michael’s birthday,” said Miss Lesley, “but to end it by smashing windows is disgusting behaviour. It shows a great lack of self-control.”

“I think it was Hugh who broke the windows,” said Mike, not able to keep it back any longer. “We wouldn’t have done that, Miss Lesley. For one thing we would have been afraid of being caught if we did that—it made such a noise. But, you see, we left Hugh out of the party—and I think that out of spite he smashed the windows to give us a shock, and to make sure we would be caught.”

“Did you do that, Hugh?” asked the headmaster, looking at the red-faced boy.

“No, sir,” said Hugh, in a low voice. “I was in bed asleep. I don’t know anything about it.”

“Well, then, why was it you had your shoes on in bed when Mr. Wills made you get out last night?” burst out Tom. “Mike saw them!”

Hugh said nothing, but looked obstinate. He meant to stick to his story, no matter what was said.

The punishment was very just. “As you have missed almost a night’s sleep, you will all go to bed an hour earlier for a week,” said Miss Lesley.

“And you will please pay for the mending of the windows,” said the headmaster. “You too, Hugh. I am not going to go into the matter of how the windows got broken—but I think Michael is speaking the truth when he says that he would not have thought of smashing windows because of the noise. All the same, you will all twelve of you share for the mending of the windows. I will deduct it from your pocket-money.”

“And please remember, children, that although it is good to have fun, you are sent here to work and to learn things that will help you to earn your living later on,” said Miss Lesley. “There are some of you here working for scholarships, and you will not be able to win them if you behave like this.”

The children went out, feeling very miserable. It was hateful to go to bed early—earlier even than the first-formers. And they felt bitter about the payment for the windows, because they themselves had not broken them.

“Though if we hadn’t held the feast, the windows wouldn’t have been broken,” said Mike. “So in a way it was because of us they got smashed. But I know it was Hugh who did it, out of spite. Let’s not say a word to him. Let’s send him to Coventry and be as beastly as we can.”

So Hugh had a very bad time. He was snubbed by the whole of his class. The first and third-formers joined in too, and nobody ever spoke a word to him, unless it was a whispered, “Sneak! Tell-tale! Sneak!” which made him feel worse than if he had not been spoken to.

He worried very much over the whole thing. It was awful to have no friends, terrible to be treated as if he were a snake. He knew it was stupid and wrong to have broken the windows like that. He had done it in a fit of spiteful temper, and now it couldn’t be undone.

He couldn’t sleep at night. He rose the next day looking white and tired. He couldn’t do his work, and the teachers scolded him, for he was one of the children who were going in for the scholarship. He couldn’t remember what he had

learnt, and although he spent hours doing his prep, he got poor marks for it.

Hugh knew that he must win the scholarship, for his parents were not well-off and needed help with his schooling. He had brothers and a sister who were very clever, and who had won many scholarships between them. Hugh didn't want to let his family down. He mustn't be the only one who couldn't do anything.

"The worst of it is, I haven't got good brains, as they have," thought the boy, as he tried to learn a list of history dates. "Everything is hard to me. It's easy to them. Daddy and Mother don't realise that. They think I must be as clever as the rest of the family, and I'm not. So they get angry with me when I'm not top of my form, though, goodness knows, I swot hard enough and try to be."

The children all paid between them for the windows. They were mended and the remains of the feast were cleared away. The week went by, and the period for early going to bed passed by too. The children began to forget about the feast and its unfortunate ending. But they didn't forget their dislike for Hugh.

"I shan't speak a word to him for the rest of the term," said Fred. And the others said the same. Only Janet felt sorry for the boy, and noticed how white and miserable he looked. But she had to be loyal to the others, and so she said nothing to him too, and looked away whenever he came near.

"I can't stick this!" Hugh thought to himself. "I simply can't. I wish I could run away! I wish I was old enough to join a ship and go to sea. I hate school!"

CHAPTER 8

A SHOCK FOR TOM—AND ONE FOR HUGH

The days slipped by, and each one was full of interest. Janet and Mike liked their work, and loved their play. They loved being friends with Tom, and they liked all the others in their form, except Hugh.

The great excitement now was handwork. The boys were doing carpentering, and the things they were making were really beginning to take shape. The girls were doing raffia-work and were weaving some really lovely baskets. Janet couldn't help gloating over the basket she was making. It was a big work-basket for her mother, in every bright colour Janet could use. Mike was making a very fine pipe-rack for his father.

But the finest thing of all that was being made in the carpentering class was Tom's. The boy was mad on ships, and he had made a beautiful model. He was now doing the rigging, and the slender masts were beginning to look very fine indeed, set with snowy sails and fine thread instead of ropes.

There were wide window-sills in the handwork and carpentering room, and on these the children set out their work, so that any other form could see what they were doing. They all took a deep interest in what the others were making. Tom's ship was greatly admired and the boy was really very proud of it.

"I think this is the only class you really work in, Tom, isn't it?" the woodwork master said, bending over Tom's model. "My word, if you worked half as hard in the other classes as you do in mine, you would certainly never be bottom. You're an intelligent boy—yes, very intelligent—and you can use your brains well when you want to."

Tom flushed with pleasure. He gazed at his beautiful ship and his heart swelled with pride as he thought of how it would look on his mantelpiece at home, when it was quite finished. It was almost finished now—he was soon going to paint it. He hoped there would be time to begin the painting that afternoon.

But there wasn't. "Put your things away," said the master. "Hurry, Fred. You mustn't be late for your next class."

The children cleared up, and put their models on the wide window-sills. The master opened the windows to let in fresh air, and then gave the order to file out to the children's own classroom, two floors below. The handwork rooms were at the top of the school, lovely big light rooms, with plenty of sun and air.

The next lesson was geography. Miss Thomas wanted a map that was not in the corner and told Hugh to go and get it from one of the cupboards on the top landing. The children stood up to answer questions whilst Hugh was gone.

In the middle of the questions, something curious happened. A whitish object suddenly fell quickly past the schoolroom windows and landed with a dull thud on to the stone path by the bed. The children looked round in interest. What could it have been? Not a bird, surely?

Mike was next to the window. He peeped out to see what it was—and then he gave a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" asked the teacher, startled.

"Oh, Miss Thomas—it looks as if Tom's lovely ship is lying broken on the path outside," said Mike. Tom darted to the window. He gave a wail of dismay.

"It *is* my ship! Somebody has pushed it off the window-sill, and it's smashed. All the rigging is spoilt! The masts are broken!"

The boy's voice trembled, for he had really loved his ship. He had spent so many hours making it. It had been very nearly perfect.

There was a silence in the room. Everyone was shocked, and felt very sorry for Tom. In the middle of the silence the door opened and Hugh came in, carrying the map.

At once the same thought flashed into everyone's mind. Hugh had been to the top of the school to get the map—the cupboard was opposite the woodwork room—and Hugh had slipped in and pushed Tom's ship out of the window to smash it!

"You did it!" shouted Mike. Hugh looked astonished.

"Did what?" he asked.

"Smashed Tom's ship!" cried half a dozen voices.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Hugh, really puzzled.

"That will do," said Miss Thomas. "Tom, go and collect your ship. It may not be so badly damaged as you think. Hugh, sit down. Do you know anything about the ship?"

"Not a thing," said Hugh. "The door of the woodwork room was shut when I went to get the map."

"Story-teller!" whispered half a dozen children.

"Silence!" rapped out Miss Thomas. She was worried. She knew that Tom had been hated by Hugh ever since last term, and she feared that the boy really had smashed up the ship. She made up her mind to find out about it from Hugh himself, after the lesson. She felt sure she would know if the boy were telling her the truth or not, once she really began to question him.

But it was not Miss Thomas that Hugh feared. It was the children! As soon as morning school was over they surrounded him and accused him bitterly, calling him every name they could think of.

"I didn't do it, I didn't do it," said Hugh, pushing away the hands that held him. "Don't pin everything on to me simply because I have done one or two mean things. I didn't do that. I liked Tom's ship, too."

But nobody believed him. They gave the boy a very bad time and by the time that six o'clock came, Hugh was so

battered by the children's looks and tongues that he crept up to his dormitory to be by himself. Then the tears came and he sobbed to himself, ashamed because he could not stop.

"I'm going away," he said. "I can't stay here now. I'm going home. Daddy and Mother will be angry with me, but I won't come back here. I can't do anything right. I didn't smash that lovely ship. I liked it just as much as the others did."

He began to stuff some of his clothes into a small case. He hardly knew what he was doing. He knew there was a train at a quarter to seven. He would catch that.

The other children wondered where he was. "Good thing for him he's not here," said Fred. "I've thought of a few more names to call him, the horrid beast!"

They were all in their common-room, discussing the affair. Tom's ship stood on the mantelpiece, looking very sorry for itself. The woodwork master came to see it.

"It's not as bad as it might be," he said cheerfully. "Just a bit dented here. Those masts can easily be renewed, and you can do the rigging again. You're good at that. Cheer up, Tom!"

The master went out. "All very well for him to talk like that," said Tom gloomily. "But it isn't his ship. I don't feel the same about it now it's spoilt."

There came a knock at the common-room door. It was such a timid, faint knock that at first none of the children heard it. Then it came again, a little louder.

"There's someone knocking at the door," said Audrey, in astonishment, for no one ever knocked at their door.

"Come in!" yelled the whole form. The door opened and a first-former looked in. It was a small boy, with a very white, scared face.

"Hallo, Pete, what's up!" said Fred.

"I w-w-w-want to speak to T-t-t-tom," stammered the small boy, whose knees were knocking together in fright.

“Well, here I am,” said Tom. “Don’t look so scared. I shan’t eat you!”

The small boy opened and shut his mouth like a fish, but not another word came out. The children began to giggle.

“Peter, whatever’s the matter?” cried Janet. “Has somebody frightened you?”

“N-n-n-no,” stammered Pete. “I want to tell Tom something. But I’m afraid to.”

“What is it?” asked Tom kindly. He was always kind to the younger ones, and they all liked him. “What have you been doing? Breaking windows or something?”

“No, Tom—m-m-m-much worse than that,” said the boy, looking at Tom with big, scared eyes. “It’s—it’s about your lovely ship. That ship there,” and he pointed to the mantelpiece.

“Well, what about it?” said Tom, thinking that Pete was going to tell him how he had seen Hugh push it out of the window.

“Oh, Tom, it was my fault it got broken!” wailed the little boy, breaking into loud sobs. “I was in the woodwork room with Dick Dennison, and we were fooling about. And I fell against the window-sill—and—and——”

“Go on,” said Tom.

“I put out my hand to save myself,” sobbed Pete, “and it struck your lovely ship—and sent it toppling out of the open window. I was so frightened, Tom.”

There was a long silence after this speech. So Hugh hadn’t anything to do with the ship, after all! No wonder he had denied it so vigorously. All the children stared at the white-faced Pete.

“I d-d-d-didn’t dare to tell anyone,” went on the small boy. “Dick swore he wouldn’t tell either. But then we heard that you had accused Hugh of doing it—and we knew we couldn’t do anything but come and own up. So I came because it was me that pushed it out—quite by accident, Tom.”

"I see," said Tom slowly. He looked at the scared boy and gave him a kindly push. "All right. Don't worry. You did right to come and tell me. Come straight away another time you do anything, old son—you see, we've done an injustice to somebody else—and that's not good. Go along back to your common-room. I daresay I can manage to mend the ship all right."

The small boy gave Tom a grateful look out of tearful eyes, and shot out of the room at top speed. He tore back to his common-room, feeling as if a great load had been taken off his heart.

When he had gone, the children looked at one another. "Well, it wasn't Hugh after all," said Janet, saying what everyone else was thinking.

"No," said Tom. "It wasn't. And I called him a good many beastly names. For once they were unjust. And I hate injustice."

Everyone felt uncomfortable. "Well, anyway, he's done things just as horrid," said Fred. "It's no wonder we thought it was him. Especially as he just happened to be by the woodwork room at the time."

"Yes," said Mike. "That was unlucky for him. What are we going to do about it?"

Nobody said anything. Nobody wanted to apologise to Hugh. Tom stared out of the window.

"We've got to do something," he said. "Where is he? We'd better find him and get him here, and then tell him we made a mistake. We were ready enough to be beastly—now we must be ready to be sorry."

"I'll go and find him," said Janet. She had remembered Hugh's startled face as the others had suddenly accused him when he had come into the room carrying the map. She thought, too, of his miserable look when they had all pressed round him after tea, calling him horrid names. They had been unjust. Hugh had done many mean things—but not that one. Janet suddenly wanted to say she was sorry.

She sped into the classroom. Hugh wasn't there. She ran to the gym. He wasn't there either. She looked into each music-room, and in the library, where Hugh often went to choose books. But he was nowhere to be found.

"Where can he be?" thought the little girl. "He can't be out. His clothes are hanging up. What has he done with himself?"

She thought of the dormitory. She ran up the stairs, and met Hugh just coming out, carrying a bag, with the marks of tears still on his face. She ran up to him.

"Hugh! Where have you been? What are you doing with that bag? Listen, we want you to come downstairs."

"No, you don't," said Hugh. "None of you want me. I'm going home."

"Hugh! What do you mean?" cried Janet, in alarm. "Oh, Hugh, listen. We know who broke Tom's ship. It was little Pete. He pushed it out of the window by accident! Don't go home, Hugh. Come down and hear what we have to say!"

CHAPTER 9

THINGS ARE CLEARED UP!

But Hugh pushed past Janet roughly. He did not mean to change his mind. Janet was scared. It seemed a dreadful thing to her that Hugh should run away because of the unkindness he had received from his class. She caught hold of the boy and tried to pull him back into the dormitory.

"Don't," said Hugh. "Let me go. You're just as bad as the others, Janet. It's no good your trying to stop me now."

"Oh, do listen to me, Hugh," said Janet. "Just listen for half a minute. Pete came and owned up about the ship. He pushed it out of the window when he was fooling about. And now you can't think how sorry we are that we accused you."

Hugh went back into the dormitory, and sat on the bed. "Well," he said bitterly, "you may feel pretty awful about it—but just think how I must feel always to have you thinking horrid things about me, and calling me names, and turning away when you meet me. And think how I felt when I woke up the other night and found everyone had gone to a midnight feast—except me! *You've* never been left out of anything. Everyone likes you. You don't know what it's like to be miserable."

Janet took Hugh's cold hand. She was very troubled. "Hugh," she said, "we did mean to ask you to our feast. Mike and Tom and I planned that we would. We didn't want you to be left out."

"Well, why didn't you ask me then?" demanded Hugh. "It would have made all the difference in the world to me if only you had. I'd have felt terribly happy. As it was you made me lose my temper and do something horrid and spiteful. I've been ashamed of it ever since. I spoilt your feast—and got you all into trouble. I wanted to do that, I know—but all the

same I've been ashamed. And now that I'm going to run away, I want you to tell the others something for me."

"What?" asked Janet, almost in tears.

"Tell them I *did* break the windows, of course," said Hugh, "and tell them that I want to pay for them. They had to pay a share—well, give them this money and let them share it out between them. I wanted to do that before, only I kept saying I hadn't broken the windows, so I couldn't very well offer to pay, could I? But now I can."

Hugh got out his leather purse and took out some silver. He counted it and gave it to Janet. "There you are," he said. "I can't do much to put right what I did, but I can at least do this. Now good-bye, Janet, I'm going."

"No, don't go, Hugh, please don't," said Janet, her voice trembling. "Please come down and let us all tell you we're sorry. Don't go."

But Hugh shook off her hand and went quickly down the stairs, carrying his little bag. Janet flew down to the common-room, tears in her eyes and the money in her hand. She burst in at the door, and everyone turned to see what she had to say.

"I found him," said Janet. "He's—he's running away. Isn't it dreadful? He says he's ashamed of himself now for breaking the windows, and he's given me the money to give you, to pay for the whole amount. And oh Mike, oh Tom, somehow I can understand now why he broke those windows—he was so miserable at being left out!"

"I do wish we hadn't accused him unjustly," began Fred. "It's an awful pity he cheated last term like that. He seemed quite a decent chap till then—but somehow we got it into our heads after that that he was a dreadful boy and we didn't really give him a chance."

"Look here—I'm going after him," said Tom suddenly. "If the Heads get to know about this, we'll all get into awful trouble, and goodness knows what will happen to Hugh."

What's the time? Half-past six? I can catch him then, before he gets on the train."

He ran out of the school building and went to the shed where Mr. Wills' bicycle was kept. He wheeled it out and jumped on it. He didn't stop to light the lamp. Down the drive he went and out of the great school gates.

He pedalled fast, for it was quite a way to the station. He kept his eyes open for Hugh, but it was not until he had almost come to the station that he saw the boy. Hugh was running fast. He had been running all the way, because he had been so afraid of missing the train.

Tom rode up close to him, jumped off the bicycle, clutched Hugh's arm and pulled him to the side of the road. He threw the bicycle against the hedge, and then dragged the astonished boy into a nearby field.

"What's up? Oh, it's you, Tom! Let me go. I'm going home."

"No, you're not," said Tom. "Not until you hear what I've got to say, anyway. Listen, Hugh. We're ashamed of ourselves. We really are. It's true you've been pretty beastly and spiteful—but it was partly because of us. I mean, we made you behave like that. I see that now. If we'd behaved differently you might have, too. You were a decent chap till the end of last term. We all liked you."

"I know," said Hugh, in a low voice. "I was happy till then. Then I cheated. I know there's no excuse for cheating—but I had a reason for my cheating. It seemed a good reason to me then, but I see it wasn't now."

"Somehow or other I had to pass that exam," said Hugh. "All my brothers and my sister are clever and pass exams and win scholarships, and my father said I mustn't let the family down. I must pass mine too. Well, I'm not really clever. That is why I have to swot so hard, and never have time to play and go for walks as the rest of you do. So, as I was afraid I'd not pass the exam, I cheated a bit. And you gave me away."

"I didn't," said Tom. "I saw you'd cheated, but I didn't give you away. Why don't you believe that? Miss Thomas found it out."

"Do you swear you didn't give me away?" said Hugh.

"I swear I didn't!" said Tom. "You've never known me to sneak, have you, or to tell lies? I do a lot of silly things and play the fool, but I don't do mean things."

"All right. I believe you," said Hugh. "But I can't tell you how the thought of that cheating, and knowing that you all knew it, weighed on my mind. You see, I'm not really a cheat."

"I see," said Tom. "It's really your parents' fault for trying to drive you too hard. You're silly. You should tell them."

"I'm going to," said Hugh. "That's one thing I'm going home to say now. And I've been so miserable this term that what brains I have won't work at all! So it's no good me trying for the scholarship anyhow. Somehow things aren't fair. There's you with brains, and you don't bother to use them. There's clever Janet and Mike, and they fool about and don't really try to be top when they could. And there's me, with poor brains, doing my very best and getting nowhere."

Tom suddenly felt terribly ashamed of all his fooling and playing. He felt ashamed of making Mike and Janet do bad work too, for they none of them really tried their hardest. He bit his lip and stared into the darkness.

"I've done as much wrong as you have," he said at last. "You cheated because you hadn't got good enough brains—and I've wasted my good brains and not used them. So I've cheated too, in another way. I never thought of it like that before. Hugh, come back with me. Let's start again. It's all been a stupid mistake. Look—give us a chance to show you we're sorry, won't you?"

"You didn't give *me* a chance," said Hugh.

"I know. So you can feel awfully generous if you will give *us* a chance!" said Tom. "And look here, old son—I'm not going to waste my good brains any more and cheat the

teachers out of what I could really do if I tried—I'm going to work hard. I'll help you, if you'll help me. I don't know how to work hard, but you can show me—and I'll help you with my brains. See?"

Just then a loud whistle came from the station and then a train puffed out. Hugh looked at the shower of sparks coming from the funnel.

"Well, the train's gone," he said. "So I can't go with it. I'll have to come back with you. Let me sleep over it and see how I feel in the morning. I don't want to see any of you again to-night. I should feel awkward. If I make up my mind I can begin all over again, I'll nod at you when we get up—and just let's all act as if nothing had happened. I can't stand any more of this sort of thing. I simply **MUST** work if I'm going to enter for that scholarship."

The two boys went back together. Hugh went straight upstairs to his dormitory, telling Tom to say that he didn't want any supper. But before he went, Hugh held out his hand.

There was a warm hand-shake between the two of them and then Tom went soberly back to the common-room, wondering what to say. The children crowded round him and Tom explained what had happened.

When they heard what Hugh had said about how he was expected to do as well as his brothers and sister, and how he knew he hadn't good enough brains, they were silent. They knew then why Hugh had swotted so much. They even understood why he had been tempted to cheat. Every child knew how horrid it was to disappoint parents or let their family down.

"Well, let's hope he'll make up his mind to stay," said Tom. "And listen—I feel quite a bit ashamed of *my* behaviour too. My parents pay for me to learn things here, and I never try at all—except in woodwork. I just fool about the whole time, and make you laugh. Well, from now on, I'm going to do a spot of work. And so are you, Mike and Janet. You've

neither of you been top once this term, and you could easily be near it, and give Doris a shock!"

"All right," said Janet, who had been thinking quite a lot too, that night. "I'll work. Miss Thomas said to-day she would give me a bad report because I've not been doing my best. I don't want that. Mike will work too. We always do the same."

Hugh was asleep when the children went up to bed. For the first night for a long time he was at peace, and slept calmly without worrying. Things had been cleared up. He was happier.

In the morning the boys got up when the bell went. Tom heard Hugh whistling softly to himself as he dressed, and he was glad. Then a head was put round Tom's curtains, and Tom saw Hugh's face. It was all smiles, and looked quite different from usual.

Tom stared at the smiling head. It nodded violently up and down and disappeared. Tom felt glad. Hugh was doing the sensible thing—starting all over again, and giving the others a chance to do the same thing!

And what a change there was for Hugh that morning when the boys and girls met in their common-room! He was one of them now, not an outcast—and everyone felt much happier because of it.

CHAPTER 10

END OF TERM

Miss Thomas and the other teachers had a pleasant shock that week. For the first time since he had been at St. Rollo's Tom began to work! The teachers simply couldn't understand it. Not only Tom worked, though—Mike and Janet did too.

"Something's happened that we don't know about," said Miss Thomas to Mr. Wills. "And do you notice how much happier that boy Hugh looks? It seems as if the others have decided to be nicer to him. It's funny how Tom seems to have made friends with him all of a sudden. They even seem to be working together!"

So they were. They did their prep. together, and learnt many things from each other. Tom's quick brains were useful at understanding many things that Hugh's slow brains did not take in—and Hugh's ability for really getting down to things, once he understood them, was a fine example for the rather lazy Tom.

"You make a good team," said Miss Thomas approvingly. "I am pleased with you both. Tom, I think it would be a good idea to move you away from that front desk, and put you beside Hugh. You can help one another quite a lot."

"Oooh, good," said Tom, his eyes gleaming. "It does rather cramp my style, Miss Thomas, to be under your eye all the time, you know."

The class laughed. They had been surprised at Tom's sudden change of mind regarding his work. But they were afraid that he might no longer fool about as he used to do. He always caused so much amusement—it would be sad if he no longer thought of his amazing tricks.

“Don’t worry,” said Tom, when Mike told him this. “I shall break out at times. I can’t stop thinking of tricks even if I’m using my brains for my work too!”

He kept his word, and played one or two laughable tricks on poor Monsieur Crozier, nearly driving him mad. Tom provided him with a pen on his desk, which on being pressed for writing, sent out a stream of water from its end. The French master was so angry that he threw the blackboard chalk down on the floor and stamped on it.

This thrilled the class immensely, and was talked of for a long time. In fact, that term, on the whole, was a very exciting one indeed. Mike and Janet got quite a shock when they realised that holidays would begin in a week’s time!

“Oh! Fancy the term being so nearly over!” said Janet dolefully.

“Gracious, Janet, don’t you want to be home for Christmas?” said Marian.

“Yes, of course,” said Janet. “But it’s such fun being at St. Rollo’s. Think of the things that have happened this term!”

Miss Thomas overheard her. She smiled. “Shall I tell you what is the most surprising thing that has happened?” she said.

“What?” asked the children, crowding round. Miss Thomas held the list of marks for the last week in her hand. She held it up.

“Well, for the first time this term Tom Young isn’t bottom!” she said. “I couldn’t believe my eyes when I added up the marks—in fact I added them all up again to make sure. And it’s true—he actually isn’t bottom. Really, the world must be coming to an end!”

Everyone roared with laughter. Tom went red. He was pleased.

“I suppose I’m next to bottom, though,” he said, with a twinkle.

“Not even that!” said Miss Thomas. “You are sixth from the top—simply amazing. And Hugh has gone up too—he is

seventh. And as for Mike and Janet—well, wonders will never cease! They tie for second place, only two marks behind Doris!”

Mike, Janet, Tom and Hugh were delighted. It really was nice to find that good work so soon showed results. Hugh took Tom’s arm.

“I can’t tell you how you’ve helped me,” he said. “Not only in my work—in other ways too. I feel quite different.”

The children thought that Hugh looked different too. He smiled and laughed and joked with the others, and went for walks as they did. Who would have thought that things could possibly have turned out like that, after all?

The term came quickly to an end. There were concerts and handwork exhibitions—and, not quite so pleasant, exams as well! All the children became excited at the thought of Christmas, pantomimes, presents and parties, and the teachers had to make allowances for very high spirits.

The last day came. There was a terrific noise everywhere, as packing went on in each dormitory, and boys and girls rushed up and down the stairs, looking for pencil-boxes, books, boots, shoes and other things. There were collisions everywhere, and squeals of laughter as things rolled down the stairs with a clatter.

“I suppose all this noise is necessary,” sighed Mr. Wills, stepping aside to avoid somebody’s football, which was bouncing down the stairs all by itself, accompanied above by a gale of laughter. “Dear me—how glad I shall be to say good-bye to all you hooligans! What a pity to think you are coming back next term!”

“Oh no, sir—we’re glad!” shouted Mike, rushing down after the football. “We shall love the holidays—but it will be grand to come back to St. Rollo’s!”

Good-byes were said all round. Some of the children were going home by train, some by car.

“Good!” said Janet. “We don’t need to say good-bye till we get to London. Look—there’s our coach at the door. Come on!”

They piled into the big coach, with about twenty other children. It set off to the station. The children looked back at the big grey building.

“Good-bye St. Rollo’s,” said Mike. “See you next term. Good-bye! Good-bye!”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Mischief at St. Rollo's* by Enid Blyton [pseudo:
Mary Pollock]]